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Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey

Child care in Canada

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.	not available for any reference period
..	not available for a specific reference period
...	not applicable
0	true zero or a value rounded to zero
0^s	value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
^{p}	preliminary
^{r}	revised
x	suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
^{E}	use with caution
F	too unreliable to be published
*	significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Highlights

- In 2011, almost half (46%) of parents reported using some type of child care for their children aged 14 years and younger in the past year. Child care was more often used for children aged 4 and younger (54%), than for children above the age of 4 (39%).

- Rates of child care were highest in Quebec (58%) and lowest in Manitoba (34%), Alberta (40%) and Ontario (43%).

- The majority of parents (86%) had used child care arrangements on a regular basis, particularly for young children.

- Parents primarily relied on three types of child care arrangements for their children aged 4 and under: daycare centres (33%), home daycares (31%) and private arrangements (28%). The use of these arrangements varied widely by province.

- Before and after school programs were the most common type of child care arrangement for school-aged children in Quebec, Ontario and eastern Canada. Conversely, private arrangements were the top choice among parents in western Canada.

- The location of the child care arrangement was the leading reason behind parents' decision to use a particular type of care, as reported by 33% of parents. Next was trust in the care provider (18%).

- The median cost of full-time child care differed by province, ranging from a low of $152 per month in Quebec to a high of $677 in Ontario.

- Overall, 69% of parents indicated that they were very satisfied with the overall quality of their child care arrangement, and another 29% were satisfied.

Child care in Canada

By Maire Sinha

Over the last three decades, the need for child care has grown steadily, with the rise in employment rates among women[1] and the corresponding increase in dual-income earner families. This has accompanied changes in the composition of Canadian families, notably increases in lone-parent and step-families, impacting both the need and type of child care required (Bushnik 2006).[2]

Beyond need, the demand for quality child care has also increased, due to the potential benefits on peer socialization, school readiness, and numeracy and language skills (OECD 2006, Nores and Barnett 2010). In Canada, options for child care are varied, ranging from nannies, home daycares,[3] daycare centres, preschool programs, and before and after school services. Finding the most appropriate child care arrangement can, at times, be challenging. Parents must often balance the need between the overall quality, convenience, availability and cost of child care.

Using the 2011 GSS on Families, this report provides an overview of child care in Canada, examining its overall use, factors influencing use, types of child care arrangements, and cost. For the purpose of this report, the term 'child care' is used to refer to non-parental care, that is, the care of children by someone other than a parent or guardian.[4]

Use of child care across Canada

Almost half of parents reported using child care for their children

In 2011, almost half (46%) of parents reported using some type of child care for their children aged 14 years and younger in the past year. This reliance on child care varied widely based on the age of the child. More than half (54%) of parents with children aged 4 and under used child care, mirroring previous findings from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (Bushnik 2006). In comparison, 39% of parents with school-aged children (5 to 14 years) used some form of non-parental care.

These two broad figures, however, mask important age-specific differences. In particular, parents of infants aged 1 and younger were among the least likely to use child care, with about one-quarter (26%) doing so. The lower rate generally reflects both the availability of employment insurance benefits in the child's first year[5] and the lower rate of mother's labour force participation when children are very young (OECD 2013).

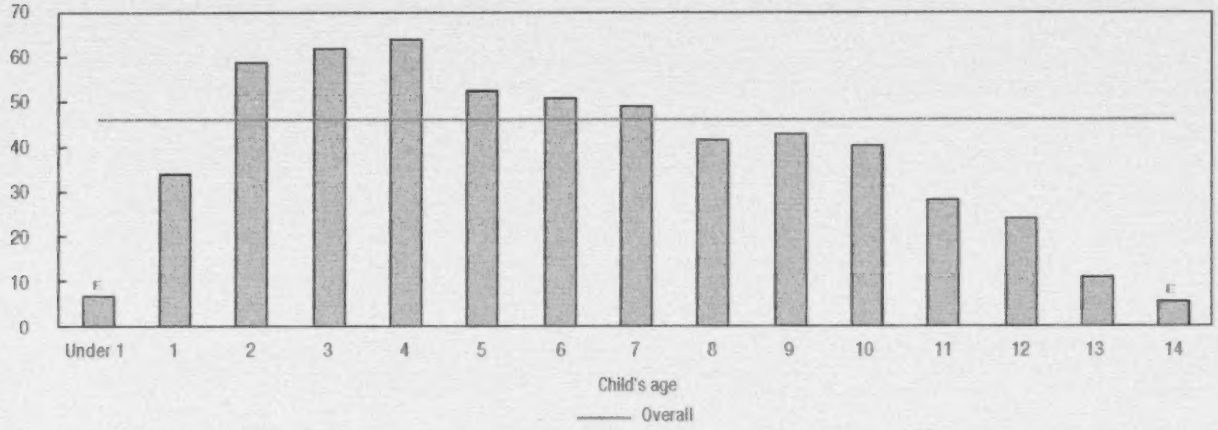
The use of child care was lower at the other end of the age spectrum, that is, for children aged 11 to 14 years (19%). Children in this age range are often considered emotionally and developmentally mature enough to be unsupervised for short periods of time (i.e., before and after school), resulting in a reduced need for child care.[6]

By far, child care arrangements were most frequently used for children aged 2 to 4 years of age (Chart 1). Roughly six in ten of these parents had some form of child care arrangement for their child. Rates were also high, though somewhat lower, for parents with children aged 5 to 7. These children are typically in the school system, and would generally need care in the morning hours before the start of school, and/or after the end of the school day.

1. The employment rate of women with children under 6 has more than doubled between 1976 and 2009, from 31% to 67% (Ferrao 2010).
2. Previous research has found that children in lone-parent households were more likely to rely on daycare centres than other child care arrangements (Bushnik 2006).
3. Home daycares may include both licensed and unlicensed home daycares outside the child's home.
4. Includes both paid and unpaid forms of non-parental care.
5. Employment insurance benefits entitle new parents to a combined maternity, parental and sickness leave of 50 weeks.
6. See, for example, Family and Social Services of the Waterloo Region (n.d.) *Help for Parents: Supervision of Children*. www.facswaterloo.org/html/HelpParentsSupervision.html

Chart 1
Use of child care highest among parents of children between the ages of 2 and 4

percent of parents using child care



E use with caution
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2011.

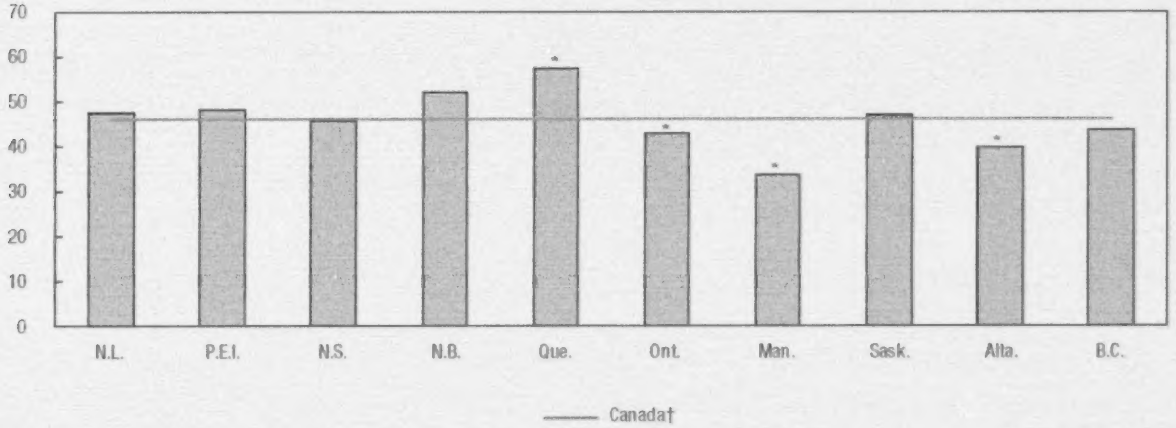
Quebec parents report highest rates of child care; Manitoba the lowest

In Canada, provincial and territorial governments are primarily responsible for child care and as such, the specific child care policies can vary across Canada. Among all provinces, Quebec's system is considered the most unique in Canada. It is the only province to have a universal child daycare program, where the cost of daycare is subsidized (Stalker and Ornstein 2013).[7]

At 58%, parents in Quebec were most likely to have used child care in the year preceding the survey (Chart 2). Manitoban parents were among the least likely, with about one-third (34%) of parents in this province reporting that they had used some form of child care in the previous year. Rates of child care were also below average in Alberta (40%) and Ontario (43%).

Chart 2
Child care rates highest in Quebec

percent of parents using child care



* significantly different from reference category
† reference category
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2011.

7. In Quebec, the cost of a reduced-contribution space is $7 per day in a subsidized daycare service. In 2009/2010, Quebec introduced revised tax credits, which made the net cost per day of a non-subsidized space in a private daycare service ($25) comparable to the net cost of reduced-contribution spaces, up to a family income of about $125,000 (Finances Quebec 2013).

These interprovincial differences were observed across all age groups, including among both children aged 4 and under, and those aged 5 to 14 years. In all provinces, a greater proportion of parents used child care for preschool-aged children than for school-aged children.

Child care most common when both parents worked outside the home

A range of factors can influence a parent's decision to place their child in non-parental care. While parents were not asked about reasons for using child care, rates of child care were generally highest among dual-income earner families.[8] In particular, 71% of households where both partners[9] worked for pay used child care for a preschool child, and 49% did the same for a school-aged child between the ages of 5 and 14.

Child care rates were also high for lone-parent families where the parent worked at a paid job or business. Over half (58%) of these parents used child care for their preschool children, and 35% used some form of non-parental care for their older children. The lowest rates of child care were among couple households where only one parent worked for pay. An estimated 42% of these parents turned to child care for their child aged 4 and under, and 25% used care for their older children.

Closely tied to patterns in labour force participation and family structure is household income. In general, parents belonging to a higher income household were more likely to have used some form of non-parental care. More precisely, about two-thirds (65%) of parents with an annual household income of at least $100,000 used child care for their preschooler. This was nearly double the rate recorded for households with an income below $40,000 (34%).[10] Along the same lines, 46% of the highest income households used child care for school-aged children, compared to 32% of the lowest income households.

Hours of care

Child care is most often used on a regular basis

Most parents (86%) using child care arrangements did so on a regular basis, that is, the same place and time every week, such as every day of the week or every Friday. In general, patterns in the regularity of child care use followed a similar pattern in the overall use, with regular child care peaking at the age 4 and steadily decreasing with the increasing age of the child.

Along with the regularity of care, parents were asked about the amount of time children spent in care. Among parents who relied on child care, 60% used their main arrangement on a full-time basis, meaning at least 30 hours a week. This was more often the case when the child had not yet entered school. In particular, 70% of parents using care for their child aged 4 and under used full-time care, compared to 36% of parents of school-aged children. This latter figure is even lower (20%), when excluding 5-year olds who may not yet be enrolled in school full-time.

Types of child care arrangements

Type of child care for young children varies by region

Parents primarily relied on three types of child care arrangements for their children aged 4 and under: daycare centres (33%), home daycares (31%) and private arrangements, such as grandparents, other relatives or nannies (28%).[11] The use of these specific types of child care arrangements, however, differed by province.

Daycare centres were most commonly used by parents in Quebec, Ontario and the Atlantic provinces, with over one-third of parents in these provinces using daycare centres for their young child (Table 1). Quebec also stood out for having the greatest proportion of parents using home daycares (50%). Quebec parents were almost twice as likely as parents elsewhere in Canada to use this form of care. Child care patterns in Quebec can be largely explained by Quebec's child care structure.

8. Refers to parents whose main activity was working at a paid job or business.
9. Includes both married and common-law partners.
10. Child care rates in Quebec are generally highest across all household income levels, though child care use follows the same overall pattern of increasing with income.
11. Includes those parents who used child care on a regular basis.

Table 1
Type of child care arrangement among parents using child care, by region

	Type of child care arrangement for children aged 4 and under		
	Home daycare	Daycare centre	Private care
	percent		
Atlantic provinces	16[E]	36	44
Quebec	50	38	10[E]
Ontario	19	36	32
Prairie provinces	31	23	43
British Columbia	25[E]	20[E]	40
Canada	**31**	**33**	**28**

[E] use with caution

Note: Responses of preschool and other child care arrangements are included in the calculation of percentages, but are not shown in the table. Therefore, totals will not add to 100%.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2011.

The reliance on family and other private arrangements was highest in eastern and western Canada. In 2011, 44% of parents living in the Atlantic provinces used private arrangements for their children aged 4 and under, as did 43% of parents in Prairie provinces and 40% of those in British Columbia.

Before and after school programs less commonly used in Western Canada

While before and after school programs were the most common type of child care arrangement for school-aged children, this was not uniformly the case across Canada. The great majority (86%) of parents in Quebec relied on before and after school programs, while about half in Ontario (50%) and the Atlantic provinces (51%) did the same.

In contrast, parents living west of Ontario were less likely to use this form of care and more often opted for private child care arrangements. In 2011, 38% of parents in the Prairies and 43% of British Columbia parents reported enrolling their child in a before and after school program.

Most parents turn to relatives or other private child care arrangements for very young children

The age of the child also had an impact on parents' choice of care, but mainly outside the province of Quebec. Very young children were most often placed in the care of relatives, nannies and other private arrangements, with over half (58%) of non-Quebec parents reporting the use of private arrangements for their infants aged 1 and younger. Private arrangements continued to be used after the age of 1, though daycare centres also became a top choice.

In particular, for children aged 2 to 3, 31% of non-Quebec parents used daycare centres and 36% relied on private arrangements. By the age of 4, daycare centres became the leading child care arrangement outside Quebec (34%), followed closely by private arrangements (28%). The use of home daycares outside of Quebec was relatively uncommon at every age, at around 20%.

This contrasts the situation in Quebec where home daycares, combined with daycare centres, were used almost exclusively. Child care patterns in Quebec can be largely explained by Quebec's child care structure, which supports reduced contribution spaces in home daycares and daycare centres.

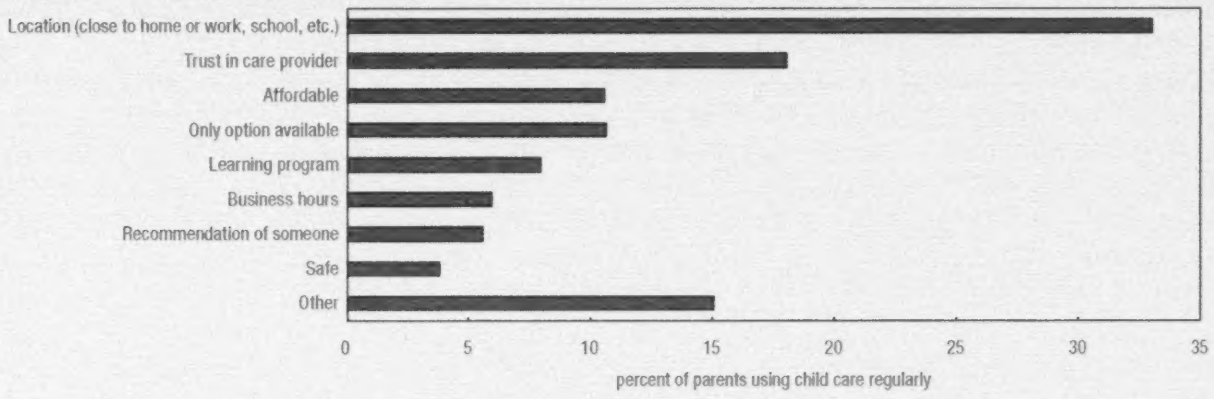
Reasons for type of child care arrangement

Location: Leading reason for child care preference

Parents cited various reasons for their decision to use a particular type of care. One-third (33%) of parents indicated that the location of the child care service was the leading reason behind their decision (Chart 3). This was followed by a feeling they could trust the care provider (18%), the affordability of care (11%), and the feeling that it was the only option available (11%). These reasons were the same, regardless of the age of the child.

Chart 3
Location: Leading reason behind choice of child care

Main reason for using type of care



Note: Responses of "don't know" and "not stated" are included in the calculation of percentages, but are not shown separately.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2011.

Differences, however, were observed based on where parents lived. Quebec parents were more likely to identify location as a reason for care (44% versus 33%) and half as likely to mention trust in the care provider (8% versus 18%). The latter difference may be partly explained by the finding that almost two-thirds of Quebec parents with preschoolers relied on a government accredited centre or family-based care (i.e., centre de la petite enfance), which are subject to specific regulations. The reason of 'only option available' was most often identified by parents living in Quebec (21%), Manitoba (19%), and Newfoundland and Labrador (15%).

Factors influencing type of child care arrangement

The preference of one child care arrangement over another can depend on such factors as household income, family structure and work/study patterns of parents[1] (Bushnik 2006). According to the 2011 GSS, parents with a household income below $40,000 were most likely to use a daycare centre, over any other type of child care arrangement. This result is consistent with previous findings (Bushnik 2006), and may be explained by the eligibility of government subsidies within daycare centres. Home daycare was the most common child care arrangement for parents with a household income between $40,000 up to $100,000, while daycare centres and private arrangements were the leading choices for high-income parents, those with household income above $100,000.

Household income had little bearing on child care arrangements for older children. Before and after school services were the most common for all income levels, with the exception of parents reporting a household income of $40,000 to $59,999. For these parents, private arrangements were the top choice for their school-aged children.

1. Sample size was too small to examine impact of family structure and work/study patterns on choice of child care arrangements.

Cost of child care

Monthly per child cost of full-time care ranged from $152 in Quebec to $677 in Ontario

Parents were asked about their child care expenditures.[12] These costs are based on the amount of money spent by parents and account for any reductions based on subsidies, but does not consider income tax credits or other financial supports which can reduce total out-of-pocket expenses.

One of the main contributing factors to parents' costs is where they live. Child care programs and subsidies can vary from one province to another, influencing the actual cost to parents. Most notably, because of Quebec's differing child care model, significant differences in child care costs exist for parents living in Quebec compared to elsewhere in Canada.

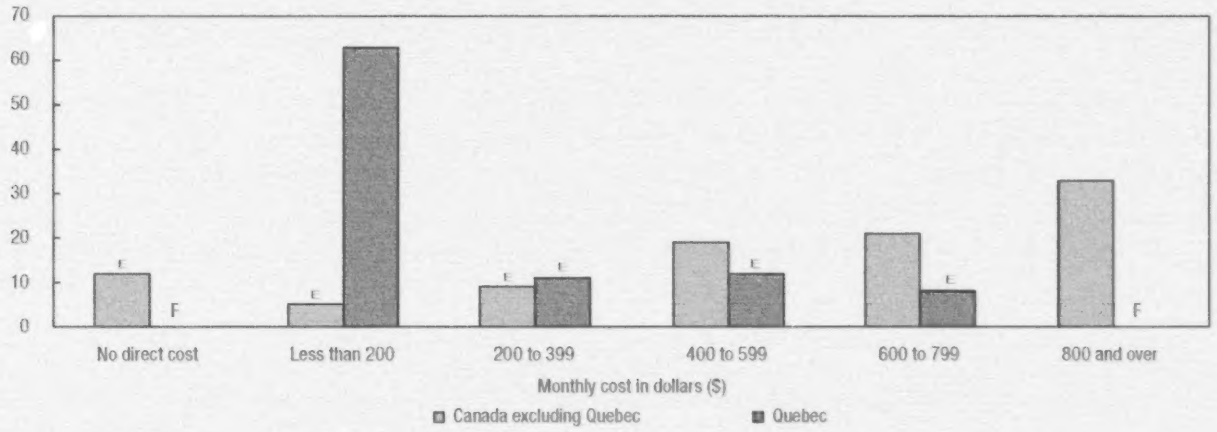
Reflecting Quebec's subsidized daily rate of $7 per day, 65% of Quebec parents using full-time care[13] for their children aged 4 and under paid under $200 a month per child. Expressed differently, the median cost of full-time child care in Quebec was $152 a month,[14] making it almost four times lower than the second lowest region, the Atlantic provinces, which recorded a median cost of $541 a month. The highest cost of full-time child care for children aged 4 and younger was found in Ontario, with a median cost of $677.

One in eight parents outside Quebec had no direct cost of child care

A certain portion of parents who used child care reported no direct cost of child care for their young children. This was most often the case outside of Quebec, where about one in eight parents reported no cost of full-time care for their preschooler (Chart 4). The absence of cost may reflect subsidies for lower-income parents, which makes parents totally exempt from any child care expenses. Alternatively, the actual cost of child care may not be borne by the parents themselves, as other family members or friends may pay for the cost of care. In other cases, the non-parental care provider may be unpaid.[15]

Chart 4
One in eight parents outside Quebec had no direct cost of child care for their preschooler

percent of parents using full-time care



E use with caution
F too unreliable to be published
Notes: Full-time child care comprises at least 30 or more hours of care a week. Monthly dollar amount is based on cost per child and not on total household cost.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2011.

12. Parents were asked to report on the child care expenses for each child. They could report daily, weekly or monthly costs.
13. Full-time care refers to parents who rely on child care for at least 30 or more hours a week.
14. Refers to cost per child.
15. This may include arrangements where extended family members, colleagues and neighbours alternate child care.

Cost of before and after school care varies

The cost of care is generally tied to hours of care, with fewer hours of care translating into reduced expenditures for parents. This means that costs are typically lower for older children, who are enrolled in school full-time and spend only part of their time in child care. A fairly even spilt in cost was observed among parents living outside the province of Quebec. About half of parents (48%) paid under $200, while the other half (52%) paid $200 or more per month for before and after school arrangements.[16]

In Quebec, the vast majority (90%) of parents paid under $200 for before and after school care. No marked difference in cost was evident between private arrangements and before and after school services.

Satisfaction with child care

Vast majority of parents satisfied with child care arrangement

Overall, most parents were satisfied with their main type of child care arrangement. In particular, 69% of parents indicated that they were very satisfied with the overall quality of their child care arrangement and another 29% were satisfied.[17] Less than a handful (2%) of parents were dissatisfied. Quebec parents were generally not more satisfied than overall, despite the unique nature of Quebec's subsidized child care system.

Summary

About half of all Canadian parents used some form of child care for their children aged 14 years and younger in 2011. Overall, child care rates peaked between the ages of 2 and 4, then subsequently declined with increasing age. Across all ages, Quebec parents were most likely to turn to child care.

The types of child care arrangements varied by province. Private arrangements, such as family members and nannies, were most common in eastern and western Canada, while daycare centres were most frequently used in Quebec, Ontario and the Atlantic provinces. The median cost of full-time child care also differed by province, ranging from a low of $152 per month in Quebec to a high of $677 in Ontario.

Data source

This report is based on Cycle 25 of the General Social Survey (GSS) on Families, conducted in 2011. The target population included all persons 15 years and older living in the ten provinces of Canada, excluding full-time residents of institutions. In 2011, all respondents were interviewed by telephone. Households without telephones or with only cellular phone service were excluded. Based on the 2010 Residential Telephone Services Survey (RTSS), these two groups combined represented approximately 14% of the target population. This proportion may be higher for 2011 due to the likely increase in cellular-only households.

Once a household was contacted, an individual 15 years or older was randomly selected to respond to the survey. The sample size in 2011 was 22,435 respondents.

For this report, the target population included all parents who lived in the same household as their child aged 14 years or younger.

Data collection

Data collection took place in 2011. Computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) was used to collect data. Respondents were interviewed in the official language of their choice.

16. Refers to care under 30 hours per week.

17. In cases where parents had differing assessments of child care arrangements for multiple children, only the highest level of satisfaction was considered. Therefore, percentages for dissatisfaction with child care arrangement may be slightly underestimated.

Response rates

The overall response rate was 65.8%. Types of non-response included respondents who refused to participate, could not be reached, or could not speak English or French. Survey estimates were weighted to represent the non-institutionalized Canadian population aged 15 years or over.

Data limitations

As with any household survey, there are some data limitations. The results are based on a sample and are therefore subject to sampling error. Somewhat different results might have been obtained if the entire population had been surveyed. This article uses the coefficient of variation (CV) as a measure of the sampling error. Any estimate that has a high CV (over 33.3%) has not been published because the estimate is too unreliable. In these cases, the symbol 'F' is used in place of an estimate in the figures and data tables. An estimate that has a CV between 16.6 and 33.3 should be used with caution and the symbol 'E' is referenced with the estimate. Where descriptive statistics and cross-tabular analysis were used, statistically significant differences were determined using 95% confidence intervals.

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